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C O N F I D E N T I A L KIGALI 000151

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SUBJECT: EUROPEAN COMMISSION TEAMS RECOMMEND MONITORS,
BUDGET SUPPORT FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: KIGALI

Classified By: Ambassador Michael R. Arietti, reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Two groups of EC election experts recently visited Rwanda. One team, concerned with election monitoring, will recommend to Brussels that a 60-plus election monitoring team be sent to Rwanda for the Chamber of Deputies election this fall. An earlier EC group, which evaluated prospects for direct budget support to the National Election Commission (NEC), will recommend a combined donor fund be jointly administered by the EC and the NEC. The teams regard the fall election as a potentially important step forward in Rwanda's evolving democracy. If political parties are allowed to campaign freely and the votes are counted properly, Rwanda can begin to put behind it the flawed 2003 elections. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The two teams found the Rwandan National Elections Commission (NEC) to be generally competent and experienced. The NEC was making good progress in finishing voter registration and a new voters lists by May. The NEC's plan to reduce levels of election compilation from five to three -- with returns sent digitally from polling stations to district headquarters to national headquarters in Kigali, eliminating the previous use of sector and provincial centers -- made sense and was technically feasible. The budget support team had some concerns about the NEC's ability to manage significant donor contributions; the NEC's insistence that it would manage all donor contributions for the fall elections ("with help from the donors") was met with polite but firm resistance by the EC team.

¶3. (C) The EC monitoring team will send a core team several months before the elections, 16 long-term observers six weeks in advance, and 44 short-term monitors a week or so before the elections (which, according to the team, will now occur in late October or early November -- previously the NEC had indicated the end of September). A team of EU parliamentarians may also come. The monitoring team will erect its own telecommunications network. In a meeting with Foreign Minister Murigande, the EC team mentioned its intent to bring sixty observers, to which the Foreign Minister replied, "subject to our vetting; we reserve the right to refuse entry to anyone we deem hostile to Rwanda." While acknowledging that any government had such a right, and sometimes exercised it, the EC team noted that it had never before received such an open expression of "the right to refuse" from a government representative. The EC team told us it had previously decided to internally vet its observer

team with care, and avoid "area experts" who would be considered biased. Two of the EC team had themselves observed the 2003 elections, would offer a wealth of previous experience to the effort, and anticipated returning in the fall without any problem.

¶4. (C) The EC team will also seek to work with local observer organizations, and it canvassed local diplomatic missions on reputable local organizations capable of mounting observer operations (the consensus opinion settled on the Great Lakes Human Rights League -- LDGL -- as the most capable). The EC team expressed concern at the ability of the Platform for Election Observation in Rwanda (POER), which QPlatform for Election Observation in Rwanda (POER), which oversaw local observer teams in 2003, to do so again this year. By POER's own admission, it is "struggling with its organization," according to the EC monitoring team. In a recent workshop on elections attended by pol assistant, a POER representative opined that "there were no problems with the 2003 elections," an observation greeted with dismay by other participants.

¶5. (C) The EC team noted at a briefing for diplomatic missions on March 4 that the EC generally funds ten to twelve observer missions around the world, and it is fairly selective in its choices -- the elections must have some importance both nationally and in terms of advancing democracy generally. On that basis, the EC teams considered the Rwandan Chamber of Deputies elections this fall to be worthy of support. While the executive branch would not change (President Kagame faces the voters in 2010), this election would directly test the ability of political parties and the NEC to function freely, without government interference. With the advent of the new law on political parties last June, the team commented, parties had been able

to organize down to the lowest administrative level, a degree of penetration, particularly in rural areas, not previously allowed -- an encouraging improvement in the electoral terrain.

¶6. (C) Comment. This mission agrees with the EC assessments -- the fall Chamber of Deputies election will offer a clear test of the Rwandan government's commitment to multiparty democracy, and the free functioning of political parties and the National Electoral Commission. USG support for these elections (we have an outstanding ESF request for political party training and independent media outreach) could help make a difference. End comment.

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